

FOREWORD

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The Second International Conference on Society and Environment in Transition under the auspices of the American Division of the World Academy of Art and Science (WAAS) and The New York Academy of Sciences was held on the premises of The New York Academy of Sciences May 6-11, 1974. The theme of the Conference is stated in the subtitle "World Priorities."

The First International Conference laid a broad foundation for subsequent activities by examining scientific developments, social consequences and policy implications (*Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 184, published June 7, 1971). Significant recent trends and impending developments were concisely reviewed by outstanding contributors to the physical, biological, and cultural realms of knowledge. These developments were weighed in terms of their current and prospective impacts on society and environment. Preliminary efforts were made to clarify the policy implications of new knowledge.

Recognizing the fundamental importance of continuity and definiteness the First Conference recommended the appointment of a Continuation Commission. The Working Groups into which the First Conference had divided itself were successful in formulating preliminary policy papers that dealt with preferred goals and strategies of public policy. Taking off from these documents the Continuation Commission obtained the cooperation of twenty panels who prepared brief reviews and appraisals of public policy in reference to "earth and space," "life," and "culture." These reports were published and distributed on request among official and private persons and organizations who were involved in environmental policy (*Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 216, published May 18, 1973).

The Second International Conference on Society and Environment in Transition is a further step toward closing the gap between knowledge and policy. Public policy requires continual re-examination of priorities. We have characterized priorities as judgments of importance and urgency among and within various fields of choice. Policy priorities therefore are recommended allocations of capabilities in time and place.

A word must be said about the mode of operation of the First and Second International Conferences. The participants took multiple responsibilities: (1) as writers of papers they presented a summary of their contribution and participated in the discussion of all papers; and (2) as members of a working group at the Conference they engaged in the preparation of policy recommendations and joined in the discussion of all recommendations to the plenum. The 1970 Conference emphasized the working groups, and the Second Conference went even farther in this direction. The result in both cases was to create a much more active and demanding environment than is traditional at scientific meetings where reading of papers is the norm.

For many participants the arrangements of 1970 and 1974 were novel and even disturbing. We must express our admiration for the smoothness with which nearly everyone adapted to the situation. We appreciate the generosity of spirit that made it possible for so many members to congratulate the Conference organizers on the format.